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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 004273

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR NEA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [EG](#) [IS](#) [IT](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: MUBARAK IN ITALY: EXPELLING ARAFAT WOULD BE A DANGEROUS MISTAKE

REF: A. FBIS EUP20030913000007

[1](#)B. FBIS EUP20030912000104

[1](#)C. ROME 1910

[1](#)D. ROME 2495

CLASSIFIED BY: POL M/C TOM COUNTRYMAN FOR REASON 1.5 (B),(D)

1.(U) PRESS COVERAGE OF EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT MUBARAK'S 10-12 OCTOBER VISIT TO ROME FOCUSED ON HIS VIEWS OF THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION AND ISRAEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT IT INTENDED TO EXPEL YASIR ARAFAT FROM THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES. IN STRAIGHTFORWARD AND BALANCED REMARKS, THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT DENOUNCED ISRAEL'S THREAT TO EXPEL ARAFAT AS A "DANGEROUS MISTAKE," NOT BECAUSE OF ANY LOYALTY TO ARAFAT BUT BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN THE CHOSEN PALESTINIAN LEADER FOR FOUR DECADES AND HIS EXPULSION WOULD ONLY DESTABILIZE THE SITUATION EVEN FURTHER. ARAFAT IS "OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE" TO THE PEACE PROCESS, MUBARAK ARGUED. HE ALSO APPEALED TO THE QUARTET TO BRING THE ROAD MAP BACK TO LIFE, AS THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE PEACE, A SENTIMENT SHARED BY HIS ITALIAN COUNTERPARTS.

[1](#)2. (SBU) PM BERLUSCONI REPORTEDLY REMAINED SILENT WHEN QUESTIONED BY HIS GUEST ABOUT THE POSSIBLE EXPULSION OF ARAFAT, SAYING HE HAD NOT YET CONSULTED WITH EU PARTNERS. PRESIDENT CIAMPI, HOWEVER, SHARED MUBARAK'S SENTIMENT, EXPRESSING HIS HOPE THAT ISRAEL WOULD REFRAIN FROM TAKING ACTIONS, SUCH AS EXPELLING ARAFAT, THAT COULD AGGRAVATE TENSIONS. FM FRATTINI, SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE EU, ALSO CALLED ON ISRAEL TO "AVOID ANY SHOW OF FORCE, ESPECIALLY THE EXPULSION OF PRESIDENT ARAFAT, WHICH COULD JEOPARDIZE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROAD MAP." (REF A) (COMMENT: IN HIS TRIP TO THE REGION IN JUNE (REFS C AND D), BERLUSCONI FOLLOWED PRESIDENT BUSH'S EXAMPLE IN REFUSING TO MEET WITH ARAFAT, CREATING AN UPROAR AMONG OTHER EU LEADERS WHO STILL CONSIDER ARAFAT TO BE A LEGITIMATE LEADER. FURTHERMORE, BERLUSCONI STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE U.S. POSITION THAT ARAFAT IS AN OBSTACLE TO THE PEACE PROCESS AND THEREFORE PROBABLY WAS RELUCTANT TO COMMENT. END COMMENT.)

3.(C) BOTH THE MFA AND THE EGYPTIAN EMBASSY CONFIRMED THAT MUBARAK'S PRIVATE COMMENTS WITH HIS ITALIAN HOSTS RAN ALONG THE SAME LINES AS THOSE HIGHLIGHTED IN THE PRESS, AND THAT BERLUSCONI WAS RELATIVELY SILENT ON THE ARAFAT ISSUE. EGYPTIAN DCM MAHMOUD EL-DIEB TOLD POL M/C AND POLOFF ON 17 SEPTEMBER THAT PRESS REPORTS REFLECTED WHAT WAS ACTUALLY SAID. IN ADDITION TO DISCUSSING THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION, HE ADDED, MUBARAK'S MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO MEET WITH CONFINDUSTRIA (ITALY'S LARGEST EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION) AND PRIVATE BUSINESSES IN AN EFFORT TO PROMOTE ITALIAN INVESTMENT IN EGYPT (ITALY ALREADY IS EGYPT'S LARGEST TRADING PARTNER IN EUROPE). MFA DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST FRANCESCO CERULLI ECHOED EL-DIEB'S REACTIONS, TELLING POL M/C ON 19 SEPTEMBER THAT MUBARAK'S VISIT WAS ROUTINE AND THAT A KEY GOAL WAS THE MEETING WITH ANTONIO D'AMATO, THE HEAD OF CONFINDUSTRIA.

SEMBLER

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